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THIRTY YEARS IN THE COTTON BELT.

A radio talk by James Evans, Extension Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Thursday, January 18, 1934, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

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Thirty years is a long time in a man's life, It's a long time to work with the same people. But that's what I have been doing, and I've enjoyed it, too.

For thirty years I have been associated with agricultural extension work in the southern states. The appropriation under which "The Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work" was started was made by Congress in November, 1903. Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, who is sometimes called the "Father of Agricultural Extension," was placed in charge of the work. And I was one of his first assistants.

I was assigned to a territory in Texas, one of the two southern States where extension work was first started, and I've been associated with Cotton Belt farming from that day to this. During that 30 years I have seen many changes in the South. I have seen the South fight its way up from the bottom -- through storms, droughts; boll weevils, panics, wars, and depressions. And I saw it do last year what everybody said would never be done -- plow up 10 million acres of growing cotton to reduce the supply, and increase the price.

Cotton is; naturally, the chief cash crop in the southern States. The American Cotton Belt has more natural advantages for producing cotton than any other country in the world. The South harvested in 1903, the year the demonstration work was started as a means of fighting the boll weevil, 27 million acres of cotton. I saw that acreage rise to 35 million acres in 1914, drop to 28 million in 1921, and mount to the all-time record of 44 million acres in 1926.

During the same 30 years I saw the size of our cotton crop rise from 9 million bales in 1903 to 16 million bales in 1914, drop to less than 8 million bales in 1921, and rise to the all-time record of 18 million bales in 1926. The price of cotton, in that same period, rose from 6 cents a pound in 1904 to the peak price of 44 cents in 1919 and then dropped back to a nickel a pound in 1932.

During this 30 years I have seen the carryover of American cotton rise from practically nothing to the all-time record of 13 million bales last year. And that brings me to the main point in this discussion --- Why is our carryover, or supply of cotton so big now --- Why is it so much bigger than it used to be?

The answer, both statistically, and from my own observation is that we have continued to increase production during a period of falling consumption. We have increased our production of cotton faster than the world could use it at a reasonable price. And that has placed us where we are, with the biggest supply of cotton in history, and prices, just prior to the cotton adjustment program, around the lowest in history.

During the 30 years I have worked in the Cotton Belt I have observed one thing -- one law that has worked as regularly as the rising and setting of the sun. That thing is the size of the cotton crop, and its effect on the price

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of cotton. When we have a big crop, we invariably have a medium or low price. When we have a little crop, or a shortage of cotton, we usually have a good price, and sometimes a high price.

But regardless of the price or the size of the crop, I have observed that the world usually takes over a period of years about the same amount of cotton. It may take a little more when the supply is big and the price low, but year in and year out, the world consumption of cotton remains on about the same level, with a slight increase of course in normal times for the increase in population.

When we produce about the amount of cotton the world can use at a fair price, the grower usually gets a good price for his cotton. But when we expand our production, and oversupply the world with American cotton the price drops, and the producer suffers.

So, why not then plan to produce each year as nearly as we can the amount of cotton that we know we can sell at a fair price. We know now approximately what the amount is, and we know how to produce it economically, so it seems foolish that we should go on overproducing and wrecking the market when we have an alternative.

The alternative is the cotton adjustment program. The aim of the program is to reduce cotton acreage until the world has had time to use up some of our burdensome surplus and restore the normal balance between supply and demand. Thereafter the plan production to meet known demand. The program does not aim to create a shortage and encourage foreign countries to come in. It aims to control production without creating a shortage of American cotton.

The cotton adjustment contract that is being offered cotton farmers this month proposes to do the very thing that cotton farmers have wanted for 25 years. For 25 years the agricultural colleges and the agricultural leaders of the South have been advocating a live-at-home program of farming. And in my 30 years of extension work I have observed that farmers who followed this rule were always fairly prosperous, whether times were good or bad.

We have had many acreage reduction campaigns in the Cotton Belt, but last year was the first time in the history of the South, and of the country that farmers were paid for reducing their cotton acreage. It is the first time we have ever had a program that was self supporting.

This is the supreme opportunity for the South to put itself on a permanent basis of profitable agriculture. Under the plan of the cotton adjustment program the cotton farmer has an opportunity to reduce his cotton acreage and get paid for doing it. He has the opportunity to grow food and feed crops for home use on the rented acres. An opportunity to build better pastures; to prevent his soil from washing away; and to build up the fertility of the soil by growing soil-improving crops on the rented acres.

Last, but by no means least, the cotton adjustment program offers the farm women of the Cotton Belt the greatest opportunity they have ever had to grow more small fruits and vegetables for home use, and to have more time for enjoying some of the pleasures of life.

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